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SUBJECT: GSE STALLS SPLM DESERTER REPATRIATION

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) For the past four weeks, the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) has been unable to repatriate 105 deserters from the Sudanese People's Liberation Army currently in the Eritrean border city of Tessenai. The GOSS is currently waiting for the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) to approve a charter flight to land at the nearby military base of Sawa. However, the request has been so bogged down in a bureaucratic quagmire that the GOSS has appealed directly to the office of the president. According to the deputy of the GOSS Asmara office, the troops have been packed and ready since December 8, 2008 and anticipated leaving within a week.

¶2. (C) The fate of the soldiers is uncertain. While one Sudanese interlocutor asserted the GOSS will re-integrate the soldiers into civilian life, the GOSS Asmara deputy calmly stated "they will be dealt with accordingly, as military deserters."

¶3. (C) The GSE hold-up is only the latest example of a not-so-friendly relationship between Southern Sudan and the GSE, the deputy went on. She also mentioned an earlier visit of President Isaias to Khartoum, where he lambasted Southern Sudan for "wasting its money."
MCMULLEN